

VZCZCXRO0093  
PP RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHDBU #0745/01 1110436  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P R 210436Z APR 06  
FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7290  
INFO RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 8497  
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1484  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 1488  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1534  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 1555  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1546  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1317  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1570  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC  
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1101  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS 0892  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1534  
RULSDMK/DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION WASHINGTON DC  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 000745

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
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STATE FOR SCA/CEN, EUR, EB, S/P  
NSC FOR MILLARD, MERKEL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ENRG](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [AF](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: BADAKHSHAN TO BADAKHSHAN: TAJIKS REACHING ACROSS THE BORDER  
TO AFGHANS

REF: 05 DUSHANBE 1553

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: "We consider Afghanistan like our own." Ayubek Bekmurodov, Deputy to the Governor of Tajikistan's remote Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous region said his government was looking at ways to increase trade, the power supply, and food and humanitarian aid to the Afghan regions across the river. Bekmurodov said a significant barrier to integration was the Afghans' lack of passports. The Tajiks hope to export electricity across the river, and can accelerate that process once transmission lines are installed to remote Afghan villages. Integrating their trade and infrastructure could go a long way towards boosting the economies of these poor, isolated regions and thus help stabilize and secure the border. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) In an hour-long meeting at the government offices in Khorog April 19, Bekmurodov explained to PolOff and visiting Afghan Reconstruction Officers from Kabul, how Tajik authorities plan to establish a Free Trade Zone in Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO), from its capital Khorog to Ishkashim. Bridges connect the countries at both points, and already weekly markets near the crossings indicate the potential for increased commerce and trade. The GBAO governor led a delegation to Afghanistan's Konduz and Takhar provinces in March, and is planning a trip to Faisobad in Afghanistan's Badakhshan province in early May. Bekmurodov noted the two regions' fates are tied together. "If things go badly for them, they go badly for us. We must help them." In the winter, the Tajiks provided flour and food and some medical assistance.

13. (SBU) Bekmurodov assessed that bureaucratic barriers prevent more integration between the regions. Without

identification, Afghans cannot cross easily into Tajikistan, and take advantage of the roads, telephones and other services. He noted the need for a special Tajik internal visa for the GBAO region was another hassle, but predicted that would be abolished by the government soon. (COMMENT: This has been talked about for several years. END COMMENT.)

¶4. (SBU) A second challenge is the climate and road conditions. Using the two-lane paved Tajik road, instead of the donkey footpath on the Afghan side, would allow Afghans to travel to villages along the river faster. However, those roads are not always clear. According to Bekmurodov, GBAO had more than 800 avalanches this winter, many along the main road along the Pyanzh river border. The tracks of the aging bulldozers clearing the avalanches rip up the asphalt on the newly paved parts of the road. New bulldozers on wheels would clear the roads faster, but even a used Caterpillar costs upwards of \$150,000.

¶5. (SBU) According to Bekmurodov, the power situation in Khorog and the surrounding districts has improved markedly in the last year, since PamirEnergy brought online upgraded power stations in October 2005 (reftel). Khorog now has electricity around the clock. Bekmurudov noted that cost recovery had been a problem in that past, but customers were "learning" why they needed to pay their bills (septel). Authorities were hoping to export up to one megawatt to villages directly across from Khorog this summer. Proposed plans for a 100 MW power station 100 km north of Khorog include selling power to Badakhshan, Takhar and Konduz provinces.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: Bekmurodov's interest and concern for Afghanistan were representative of comments from other officials and citizens of GBAO. There is a great deal of empathy for their "brothers and sisters" across the river, and a growing effort to turn empathy into action and integration. The Embassy will look for ways in which it can support these cross-border

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initiatives, particularly for infrastructure. END COMMENT.

¶7. (SBU) BIO NOTE: Bekmurodov is a dynamic, young, former pilot with a biology degree who has temporarily left a lucrative tour business for government service. His guided tours to hunt the rare Marco Polo sheep in eastern Tajikistan are rumored to cost \$10,000 per sheep and attract high-end spenders. Regarding his 18 months in the Governor's office, he asked, "What else can I do?" Adding, "We need new ideas in the government." He mentioned he had been to the United States numerous times to visit hunting clients. The 24-year-old technical advisor at PamirEnergy praised Bekmurodov and the Governor's team, and noted the Governor had replaced "all the old bureaucrats with young people."

SIGNATURE  
HOAGLAND